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ABSTRACT

Australia's Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) functions within the Federal Ministry of Education to undertake and support curriculum research and development tasks and to develop and disseminate teaching and learning materials. This is accomplished through consultation and cooperation with education authorities at all levels throughout the country. Recently the federal government's role in education has expanded and has enabled the CDC to exert more influence. However, it has also created federal-state tensions which hinder CDC's cooperative relations with state agencies. The CDC has supported a broad range of curriculum development by directing its resources to major issues, such as core curriculum and national projects to enhance science, mathematics, languages, the arts, and social education. Through close contacts with education officials, CDC maintains an informal as well as formal network system. It has been found that the dissemination of ideas and products has been most effective at a personal level with those who actually implement curricular change. (FG)

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Management Analysis Paper on the Curriculum Development Centre

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MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS PAPER: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Section I: BACKGROUND

The national Curriculum Development Centre is a Statutory Authority within the Federal Ministry of Education. Its functions require it to undertake curriculum research and development tasks, to develop teaching and learning materials for use in schools, to commission and support curriculum and materials development, and to arrange the printing and marketing of materials. Its program involves close consultation, co-operation and working relationships with many education authorities and bodies throughout the country. These include State, Catholic and other independent school authorities, teacher education institutions, specialist groups of teachers, government departments and agencies, and a variety of professional, parent and community groups.

The Centre, during its first few years, has supported curriculum projects and activities at local, regional and national levels in a range of learning areas, and in a variety of ways. These include construction of materials, teacher development workshops, committees of inquiry and investigation, national conferences and other meetings, position papers, reviews of educational need and other policy documents, information services, and co-operative program planning and development. It has also developed international programs and support for school-based curriculum.

Although the above functions span the full spectrum of curriculum development activity the Centre in practice has limited power to exercise a direct influence on schools or school systems. This limitation stems from the nature of the administrative and financial responsibility within the Australian education system. In numerical terms the total system is small — some 3 million students in a total population in excess of 14 million, and approximately 170,000 teachers.* In geographical terms it is vast, spreading over some 3 million square miles. In financial terms the system is experiencing a significant decline in available resources with present expenditure approximately 6% of GDP. These factors in themselves are limitations on developing and maintaining affective curriculum development. Another limitation arises from the multiplicity of curriculum agencies and the consequent dispersal of resources. Each State and Territory Department of Education includes a curriculum branch and similar work is conducted in many tertiary institutions. Thus the resource for curriculum development is substantial. However, its use is generally unco-ordinated and the achievement is less impressive than might be expected.

The administrative system is a federal one, with eight State and Territory authorities administering schools, and in each State and Territory an additional strong non-government sector comprising Catholic, other religious, mostly Christian, denominations and a small number of schools independent of either State or religious affiliation. There are also many federal and state government agencies, a large sector of universities and colleges maintained entirely by government funding, and an elaborate infrastructure including professional associations, teachers' unions, education and teachers' centres, and parent and community organisations. The overall organisation of the school system, the provision of teachers and other personnel, the design of schools, and systems of assessment, are Constitutional responsibilities of the States which develop their own statements on the aims and purposes of education. These systems are highly centralised and integrated although almost all have in recent years decentralised some of the administrative responsibility for schools through the establishment of regional directorates with limited tasks and powers. Some tensions now exist between the central and regional offices since curriculum matters have not been, to any extent, decentralised to the regional offices, these being largely by-passed in the transfer of many aspects of curriculum decision-making direct to schools. Despite this newly acquired curriculum freedom schools still experience considerable constraints in exercising this freedom. Among these are restrictions imposed by some external examinations and syllabi; the limited curriculum development expertise of many teachers, particularly those trained more than a decade ago; and the continuing influence of commercial materials, of which much still originates beyond Australia.

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* These numbers are currently stabilising as Australia experiences a temporary decline in enrolments.

As indicated earlier each State or Territory Department of Education has its own curriculum section, division or directorate, sometimes with large staffs and widely defined roles. Together with a variety of curriculum committees and Boards of Studies, they produce curriculum guidelines, syllabi and materials for schools and teachers. These are augmented by commercial materials and, in some areas of the curriculum, by materials produced by teachers' professional associations, teachers' centres, schools and tertiary institutions.

Constitutionally, the Commonwealth, and thereby the national Curriculum Development Centre, has had little power to exert a direct influence on education. However, recent years have seen the Commonwealth, through its taxation role, considerably expanding its education involvements. The Commonwealth collects all income taxes, and therefore exercises the major influence in the distribution of the tax dollar. This makes the States financially dependent, and gives the Commonwealth power to influence policies even in areas which fall within the constitutional powers of the State Governments. Significant examples of this expansion have been the establishment in 1973 of the Australian Schools Commission* and the national Curriculum Development Centre in 1974. The decision to establish the CDC has been attributed to a number of factors including:

- a number of successful Commonwealth/State joint ventures in curriculum development — the *Australian Science Education Project*, the *National Committee on Social Science Teaching*, the *Asian Studies Co-ordinating Committee* and the *National Committee on English Teaching* — for which an established, stable agency was felt to be required.
- a desire on the part of the Australian Education Council** to harness the use of the considerable resources available for curriculum development in the various States and authorities, to ensure better communication and liaison amongst state and national bodies and, where appropriate, to mount joint projects.
- the intention of the Commonwealth to provide a research, development and review function in relation to school curriculum aspects of its considerable programs of educational expenditure.

In respect of the Curriculum Development Centre the expanding Commonwealth role in Education has been both an advantage and a constraint. Financial dependability has encouraged the Centre's clients, in the main the State Departments of Education, to co-operate in major programs, particularly those applying to more than one system. On the other hand an expanding Commonwealth influence has led to increasing Federal-State tensions which frequently disadvantage the Centre in its endeavours to work co-operatively with its clients. Although these tensions seldom surface in the public mind as divisive curriculum issues, they do underlie working relations and have a marked influence on the **rate** as well as the **direction** of curriculum change.

Section II: THE NATURE OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE'S PROGRAM

The Centre is a relatively small statutory authority whose principal income derives from funds provided by the Australian Government and appropriated by the Parliament. It is governed by an appointed Council whose membership includes the Director of the Centre, a member of the Commonwealth Department of Education, three members nominated by the Australian Education Council, two members of the Schools Commission, and a member of the Australian Teachers Federation, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (parents and citizens groups), the non-Government school sector, and the group of tertiary institutions.

The Council has endorsed a broad concept of curriculum development. Thus, by "curriculum", the Centre understands the totality of experiences that a child undergoes in and through schooling. Curriculum development consequently includes: the design, production, testing and dissemination of

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* Primarily an instrumentality for the distribution of Commonwealth funds to schools (government and non-government), the Commission has sustained a high profile through its forceful and at times politically controversial policies, its interventionist strategies and a number of programs focussed on defined areas of need (e.g. disadvantaged urban and country schools and teacher in-service education).

** The body comprising Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education.

materials and of teaching-learning processes; the study of school practice and organisation to ascertain needed requirements and changes for the successful installation of new programs; systematic evaluation of the processes and effects of curriculum change; the development of resources and procedures to assist schools and teachers acting as adopters, adapters and makers of curriculum; the critical review of ideas, theories and practices relating to curriculum change; and the devising of ways and means of appropriately involving pupils, parents and community groups in aspects of the curriculum development process.

Some specific examples of the range of the Centre's curriculum development program are:

- the Language Development Project,
- the Study Group on Core Curriculum, leading to the publication, *"Core Curriculum for Australian Schools"*,
- the Japanese Language Project,
- the Visual Education Curriculum Project,
- the Environmental Education Project, and
- the Pacific Circle Project.*

A feature of the Centre's program activity is the diversity of activities and the range of 'curriculum development models' in use. The Centre does not base its work on any **one** model. Projects within the overall program demonstrate a wide range of approaches, including task forces using an objectives model for preparing classroom materials, study groups to review topics and analyse issues, traditional R, D and D teams, the preparation and wide circulation of guidelines and position papers, and commissioned evaluation studies. In each the key element is the **over-riding emphasis on co-operative endeavour,** with many projects engaging several systems and/or educational agencies.

Section III: INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Program planning and priority setting

In determining its program priorities the Centre consults widely. However, ultimate responsibility for planning each triennial program rests with the Centre itself, working within the broad framework of Government educational policy. Program planning is a continuing process which involves consideration and projection of current Centre activities, as well as considerable research and liaison with other organisations such as members of the Commonwealth Education portfolio; State, Catholic and other education systems; tertiary institutions in Australia and overseas; and parent and community organisations.

The Centre receives, for analysis, reports and papers from a large number of sources. Because of its outward orientation, Centre staff and the executive travel and consult widely, receive a large number of visitors both from overseas and within Australia, and are present at major educational conferences. Additionally, the CDC is invited to make submissions to major national and State inquiries, to present papers at major conferences, and be represented on major committees and surveys. As well, the Director has an extensive speaking and lecturing program which brings him in frequent contact with professional and public groups. The composition of the Centre's governing Council contributes a wide range of knowledge and experience in Australian educational planning and practice. All these are important sources of planning information.

Analysis of the information from all the above sources identifies needs and directions. The needs can be incorporated into the Centre's program in a number of ways such as:

- by commissioning a study or inquiry
- by nominating a new area of development and ear-marking resources in a future year or years
- by providing support to an institution or organisation already undertaking work in the area of need.

As with all program inputs, program incorporation in a substantive form requires some further assessment, often some initial development work, and close attention to resource availability and scheduling. This sequence means considerable involvement by CDC staff, Centre management recommendations, and Council concurrence and approval.

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*Details of these programs are given in the *'Project Profiles'* published by the C.D.C.

The current program* reflects a more integrated and holistic approach in an effort to use limited resources effectively. Small, specific project areas which can frequently be undertaken better by other bodies at both State and Federal level are less evident and instead, the Centre is now directing its resources to major and significant thrusts such as the development of **core curriculum** and national projects in **science, mathematics, language,** the **arts** and **social education.**

The Centre operates more effectively with a unified approach so that projects are not funded in isolation but as parts of an overall plan. The core curriculum program exemplifies this. Within the Centre's program, work on the core has been interrelated with school-based curriculum development, teachers-as-evaluators, and resource-based learning as part of a major thrust to improve the quality of learning in schools.

Establishing and sustaining networks

The policy of close association and co-operative development has meant the patient and careful establishment over several years of networks of relationships. Thus, the Centre has built up facilities for sponsoring conferences and meetings, for assisting projects already under way, co-ordinating cross-state programs, and assisting in dissemination of ideas and practices through publications, workshops, displays and the systematic exchange of information. The Centre also has exercised its responsibility for providing the initiative for fresh approaches in curriculum, a role whose successful implementation could not have been contemplated until networks of relationships had been established.

Networking is an activity in which all professional staff of the Centre are closely engaged. A quite crucial decision was taken by the Centre, late in 1975, not to set up a field-officer structure comprising Centre staff. The reason for this was partly financial but no less important was the view that to seek to establish a network of agents largely independent of the existing structures in the States, would be a retrogressive move. Thus, the CDC as a 'change agent' was not seen to be independent of existing forces and structures. The task was to work with the existing systems and bodies, to relate to their structures and processes, and to work alongside their personnel.

The network idea is not one whereby ideas and products generated in one place are spread to all others; instead the network permits joint activity, exchange, mutual influence, and the quest for shared areas of interest and activity. The CDC is one of many nodal points in the system. Its role is more to **facilitate, support** and **communicate** than it is to direct or even guide, although the publication and free distribution throughout all educational systems of the book, *"Core Curriculum for Australian Schools"*, was an exception to this general principal.

Fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of a curriculum network are the procedures and strategies developed for the **two-way** dissemination of information. Therefore the Centre has given considerable attention to the establishment of close personal relationships with key personnel within each of the State and Territory systems. These relationships have been developed both informally as a consequence of the extensive travel of CDC officers, and formally through meetings of senior State officers and regular meetings of the CDC's Contact Officers. CDC Contact Officers in the State Departments of Education are usually either the director of the curriculum section or his deputy. They are nominated CDC liaison officers whose roles include the following:

- *to assist CDC make appropriate system contact for specific information;*
- *to expediate written communication between the CDC and the system;*
- *to communicate to CDC matters of specified system policy and practice relating to CDC programs and activities;*
- *to be responsible for informing appropriate senior system personnel of CDC programs and activities;*
- *to update on a regular basis, lists of key system personnel, institutions, and associations for inclusion in the Australian Curriculum Network Index (see later);*
- *to disseminate to schools information relating to CDC activities and projects.*

During the past few years Contact Officers have met annually at the Centre and participated in

*Curriculum Development Centre Triennial Program, 1979/80 to 1981/82.

forward program planning. These meetings have also provided an informal forum for information exchange. At the local level Contact Officers provide the centre with direct access into their system and through their standing within the system, to the provision of matching resources for joint activities. Perhaps their most significant role, and one still being developed, is their link within the overall process of curriculum dissemination. Their potential significance in this area stems from their capacity to engage the extensive dissemination infrastructure that exists within each system. As indicated earlier the centralised, and extensive, curriculum structures within the systems can be a constraint on some aspects of the Centre's activity. However, in respect of dissemination these same structures provide a vital network for sustained and effective curriculum dissemination.

Dissemination

In the Curriculum Development Centre's program dissemination is given a much broader interpretation than the traditional D of the R, D and D model. The Centre sees dissemination as a two-way communication system through which activities, ideas and products are shared and communicated throughout the CDC networks. For the Centre this is a major activity which involves organising and presenting activities, ideas and products to clearly identified client groups e.g. primary and/or secondary schools, class teachers and/or administrators, parents and/or the community, regional offices, etc. Thus the Centre's **primary** task has been to see that curriculum ideas, practices, processes and products are made available to the identified potential users, and that information about curriculum issues is available to the Australian community. The **secondary** task has been to ensure the effective marketing of Centre products. In respect of the latter the Centre has achieved considerable success through its direct mailing program. In simple terms this involves direct mailing to each and every Australian school and educational agency or institution of **specific** product information in the form of posters, flyers, brochures and the like. (Over sixty such items were produced and distributed during 1980 resulting in a ten-fold increase in product sales). Much of the Centre's curriculum information regarding processes or ideas has also been effectively disseminated through direct mailing of materials such as the *'Language and Literacy'* pamphlet and the booklet, *'Core Curriculum for Australian Schools'*.

Notwithstanding the effectiveness of the direct mail program, experience has shown that face-to-face contact with CDC personnel and products continues to be an essential element in effective dissemination. The extensive travel of CDC staff and a regular program of high quality mobile displays and information wallets has proved to be effective in disseminating an awareness of, and frequently support for, CDC's interests and outcomes. These materials have proved to be particularly effective in providing information on processes, ideas, products and services to those who are engaged daily in curriculum decision-making, implementation and evaluation. That is, to teachers, school administrators, teacher organisation officials, office staffs such as inspectors/supervisors/curriculum officers, subject/program consultants, tertiary teachers and researchers, officials of parent and community bodies, administrators of education and teachers centres, etc.

Innovative features of the Centre's dissemination program include:

(a) A recognition that in the past project planning and development have not adequately addressed, nor early identified to a sufficient degree, a projects dissemination requirements.

(b) A recognition that too many development projects stress the relatively short-term objective of producing materials rather than focussing on the longer-term aim of achieving change in the teaching/learning process. In this respect these projects tend to have un-balanced budgets with little or no attention to the financial, and resource implications, required for the development and sustenance of the dissemination phases.

(c) The importance of establishing and maintaining a variety of inter-locking curriculum networks. In a country as vast as Australia this has presented particular problems which have required particular solutions. One such 'solution' has been the development of the Contact Officer Network, a network of **local** field agents. Another has been the Direct Mail Networks, where effectiveness depends on careful client identification and the use of data-processing techniques to access focus groups.

(d) An awareness of the need to continually appraise the dissemination function to avoid either over-provision of information or failure to recognise where services are inadequate or misdirected.

Section IV: **CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND CHANGE — SOME ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

- During the seventies, two key processes or overall curriculum design models had emerged: school-based curriculum development and core curriculum. At first, many commentators drew a contrast between them asserting that each constituted quite different design philosophies and approaches. More recently, some Australian educational authorities, particularly the Curriculum Development Centre and one or two State curriculum branches, have emphasised that the differences mask an interdependence of these two approaches in the Australian educational context.

  For the CDC school-based curriculum development is a **process** whereby school communities actively participate in formulating curriculum policy, mapping out overall curriculum designs, selecting resources and in some instances producing new resources, and participating in evaluation of programs and performance.

  Core curriculum, in the CDC sense, emphasises those key processes, skills, values, and basic essential learnings which are required by eveyone in a society and for which schools have a teaching responsibility. From this perspective it is possible to reconcile school-based curriculum development and core curriculum, and the recent CDC publication *"Core Curriculum for Australian Schools';'* supports this contention. In releasing this document the CDC chose to take an institutional view on a current debate of educational issues impinging upon curriculum development. For the Centre this was a bold step since the document also argued a case against national assessment, a Government supported policy, as well as disputing the widely-supported view that standards were declining.

- Those engaged in curriculum development must confront the readiness and capacity of teachers in schools to handle wide ranging and broadly defined curriculum changes. The broader changes that have been sought during the seventies in Australian school curricula, such as subject integration in primary schools, social studies, inquiry-based science in secondary schools, and greater overall emphasis on applicable knowledge and skills, indicate a need for a much wider range of changes than just the content of school programs. A particular example of this is the recognition by Australian educators that effective curriculum change requires consistent attention to teachers and their needs. Since separate agencies have responsibility for managing curriculum development and teacher development, the relationship between teacher development and curriculum development continues to be unresolved.
- The curriculum network is recognised as a key to achieving curriculum innovation and change. Supporting the network has emerged as a major endeavour and one in which the results have been most gratifying. Work is continuing in furthering the development of an *Australian Curriculum Network Index* which will identify and service the specific curriculum needs of such groups as (i) policy-makers, (ii) policy implementators, (iii) operational personnel, and (iv) community interest groups. The development of the Australian Curriculum Network Index will not only ensure that CDC information leaflets, brochures, posters, free publications, etc. reach their targets, but will also provide the facility through which the CDC will be able to provide schools and other educational institutions with lists of organisations and consultants able to offer support with specific curriculum activities.

- Australia lacks any comprehensive national curriculum policy — as distinct from policies separately engendered and fostered in different parts of the system — and it lacks the means for producing such policy. Although from the perspective of a national curriculum agency this is a critical issue facing Australian educational development in the eighties, it notably fails to attract the interest or to engage the concern of more than a handful of educational commentators. It does not appeal, perhaps because of its difficulty, to any of the major partners in the educational enterprise. Some, indeed, may see this deficiency as a distinct advantage since it confirms

diversity. However this may be, it is an issue which lacks both adequate definition and audience engagement. It is an issue to which the CDC core publication is making a useful contribution.

- The 'Take-Up' question Australian and overseas experience suggests that significant dislocation occurs when curriculum development agencies complete their work and release the outcomes to commercial organisations for publishing and marketing. The "commercial" image appears to alienate some potential users while the dissemination techniques of the publishers are rarely regarded as adequate by teachers. The CDC capacity to identify needs, allocate funds, establish and supervise projects, engage in formative evaluation include trialling, make publishing decisions, evaluations, and decide on further activity has been a distinct advantage in overcoming some of these dislocations. In particular, the identification of different consumer interests and needs, and attempts to meet these by adopting a co-operative approach to curriculum development and publishing has proved effective. The Centre is undoubtedly aided in this by its strong channels of communication with the various systemic authorities, and its close consultation and co-operation with teachers.

- In Australia, potential change agents are numerous. Supervisors, inspectors, curriculum officers, etc. are basic to all governmental systems and increasingly so in the non-government sector. They provide important educational consultant services in addition to their administrative and assessment roles. Most regard their roles as supportive of curriculum innovation and development at the school level. The proliferation of education and teachers centres, regional offices, consultant and advisory teachers, audio-visual and media experts, library and information services, syllabus committees, specialist research groups, curriculum planning and implementation services, etc. has transformed the advisory capacity of Australian education, with a significant impact upon the process of curriculum innovation and change.

Section V: **CONCLUSION**

It is unlikely that the curriculum situations outlined in this paper will change drastically in the early to mid eighties. Education in general and curriculum in particular have ceased to be electorally important issues. Change on any scale will require restructuring of bureaucracies, an immensely difficult and slow enterprise. Public concerns about the curriculum tend to be specific to very particular issues and to be sporadic and isolated. The very concepts of social, cultural and educational development rest uncomfortably in a society which values very highly material prosperity, stable government, and its leisure interests. Budgets are shrinking and developmental processes, being marginal, are amongst the first to suffer.

However, attention has been drawn to moves during the seventies to strengthen the creativity, resourcefulness and capability of the teaching profession. The shift away from prescriptive approaches to curriculum and the establishment, albeit on a tenuous footing, of a network of resource and support agencies provides a means whereby teacher professionalism can become a significant force for curriculum renewal. This is a challenge of which some leaders of the profession are conscious but it has yet to be met. The continuing vitality of school-based curriculum development will be a test of this extended professionalism of teachers.

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